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ABSTRACT

The topic of mentoring is one which has drawn renewed interest in the forensic community. Mentoring does exist in forensic coaching. A mentor can be seen both as one who makes a map for the protege and as a guide more interested in developing the traveler than fixing the road. Experienced coaches tend to see themselves and their mentors as trusted guides, while novices appear to seek mentors who would serve as mapmakers for the novices' entry into the profession. Research findings indicate that the forensic coaching community should move to: (1) establish, through existing forensic organizations, formal mentoring; (2) retain and expand informal mentoring; and (3) expand the promotion function which mentoring can serve for less experienced coaches. Some in the field seek a clearer definition of mentoring, while others see finding mentors as the most important issue. There is widespread sentiment that mentoring should both promote professional development and help novice coaches "learn the ropes." Furthermore, it is clear that even experienced coaches need mentors sometimes. Mentoring is underutilized, particularly considering that forensics is only as good as its coaches. Retired coaches and mentoring directories are excellent sources of support for forensic professionals. Mentoring should begin in graduate school and continue on novice coaches' home campuses and through forensic organizations. (SG)

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Coaches Mentoring Coaches: Follow-up on the Denver Conference on Forensics Education

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Mentor: 1. the friend to whom Odysseus, when departing Troy, gave the charge of his household.

2. a wise and trusted counselor

The American College Dictionary

The panel topic of "coaches helping coaches" is one which has had renewed interest in the forensic community. This paper will present a rehashing of long standing comment on mentoring as well as introduce some new ideas and challenges for the forensic community. At the 1990 Individual Events Development Conference, held in Denver Colorado, Cindy Carver and I presented a paper titled "Mentoring Relationships and Programs: Applications to the Forensic Community". As a follow up to the IEDC presentation, this paper will provide a review of the guidelines and suggestions emerging from the 1990 discussion concerning the development of a mentoring relationship.

Our previous paper attempted to investigate the potential for developing formalized mentoring relationships and mentor programs for the forensic community. Two questions were addressed: First, to what extent do mentoring relationships exist in the forensics community? Second, would it be desirable for the forensic community to formally or informally encourage mentoring relation ships, practices or programs?

Carver and Larson-Casselton (1990) provided a general overview of definitions and approaches to mentoring. The definition sections and the five study conclusions come from their 1990 presentation. They state that a review of mentoring literature quickly reveals that mentoring has been defined in a variety of ways. Levinson et al. (1978) offer one of the most restricted definitions suggesting: (1) that a mentor is a teacher, sponsor, counselor, developer of skills and intellect, host, guide and example; (2) that a mentor's most crucial function is to support and facilitate the realization of a dream; (3) that a mentor synthesizes the characteristics of a parent-child relationship and peer support without being either; and (4) that a mentor relationship is an intense form of love that lasts two or three years (at most ten) and possesses an 8-15 year age difference between mentor and protege. Roche (1979) on the other hand defines a mentor as someone who takes a personal interest in a person's career or who guides or sponsors a person. A less restrictive and more opperationally effective definition that applies to the forensic situation comes from Altman, Cochran, Doverspike, and Newnan (1984) mentoring is "a relationship in which a person of greater rank, experience, or expertise teaches, guides and develops a novice in an organization or profession" (p. 327).

Actual applications of mentoring in the business, academic and adult development areas indicate further that it is possible to operationally view mentoring in two ways. Daloz (1986) uses a

travel metaphor to distinguish the two approaches. First, a mentor can be viewed as one who makes a map for the protege. The mentor knows all the right people and the right paths to take. The mentor is a tour guide who has the travel tips necessary to smooth out a lot of bumps on a person's professional road. It is also possible, however, to view a mentor as a trusted guide who is more interested in developing the traveler as opposed to fixing the road. The ultimate goal is to help to assure that the protege becomes a competent traveler who can traverse assorted roads in the future. A forensic mentor might be a person who supplies information to newer coaches about tournament practices and procedures, who introduces newer coaches to other coaches, who helps to develop the self confidence of newer coaches, who promotes newer coaches to administrators on their own campuses, who helps newer coaches to develop ethical and philosophical positions related to the activity, etc.

The Carver and Larson-Casselton (1990) study was initially interested in trying to ascertain the prevalence and nature of mentoring relationships in the forensics community. Formal discussions/interviews of five experienced and five novice coaches were conducted using coaches from one of the AFA designated forensics districts. From the telephone interviews it was found that mentoring relationships do exist in the forensics community. Experienced and novice coaches alike indicated the prevalence of mentors in their coaching careers. Second, although both experienced and novice coaches appeared to

recognize the desirability of mentoring relationships they differed in the degree of that recognition. Experienced coaches seemed to associate more activities and more variety of activities with mentoring. Additionally more experienced coaches attributed more of their success as coaches to their mentoring relationships than did novice coaches. We can only speculate on the reasons for these differences. It may be that mentoring relationships are not as strong or productive today as they were a few years ago. It may be that novice coaches have less need than their predecessors for mentors although their interview responses do not tend to support this conclusion. Or it may simply be that novice coaches have not at this point in time benefited completely from their mentoring relationships or come to realize its full impact on their coaching satisfaction and success.

Third, experienced and novice coaches seemed to gravitate to different operational definitions of mentoring. Experienced coaches tended to see themselves and their mentors as trusted guides whose main goal was to develop the newer traveler on the forensics circuit. Novice coaches, on the other hand, seemed first and foremost to be seeking a mentor who would make a map for them and smooth out some of the bumps on the road to entering this profession. It is probably not surprising that learning the ropes may take precedence for new coaches trying to survive their entry into the forensics profession, but the difference in orientation between experienced and novice coaches may clearly

have implications for program development.

Fourth, the answer to the second question posed by the previous study also appeared to be affirmative. It is desirable for the forensics community to formally and informally encourage mentoring relationships, practices, and programs. Although both sets of coaches recognized the value of informal approaches to mentoring and although both sets of coaches did not want informal mentoring practices to suffer as a result of the development of more formal programs, there was a clear consensus that the forensics community should follow the lead of the business community and establish some formal mentoring programs. Wilbur (1989) reports that over one-third of all major companies in this country have now established some type of formal mentoring program.

Fifth, it seemed clear, although not mentioned by the interviewees, that the uneven distribution of men and women in the coaching profession may impact upon the existence, nature, and success of mentoring relationships for women coaches. A concern of the mentoring research in business has frequently been the dearth of female mentors for up and coming business women. (Sheehy, 1974) Bolton (1980) argues that women in business have traditionally had limited access to mentoring relationships and have as a result suffered in comparison with their male counterparts in the areas of advancement and promotion. If the mentoring literature from business can be applied to the forensics community, it may suggest that special attention should

be applied to fostering mentoring relationships for novice female coaches and to encouraging male experienced coaches to sponsor female as well as male proteges.

The following recommendations were put forth for consideration and discussion by the forensics community. Recommendation 1: Move to establish, through existing forensics organization, formal mentoring programs. Recommendation 2: Move to retain and expand the existence of informal mentoring practices and procedures. Recommendation 3: Expand the promotion function which mentoring can serve for less experienced forensic coaches.

The above recommendations from Carver and Casselton (1990) stimulated discussion and provide concerns from individuals who were a attending the session at the IEDC. In the following part of this paper some of the concerns brought up at IEDC will be listed, then some guidelines and suggestions will be offered for establishing a mentoring relationship in the forensic community.

Before looking at the specific concerns that arose from the IEDC, a restatement of concerns found in the mentoring literature will be helpful. In the body of mentoring literature three dominating concerns can be found. First, critics suggest that research design problems invalidate much of the currently existing thought dealing with the mentoring relationship (Merriam, 1983). Second, the currently existing literature on mentoring does not adequately look at the potential drawbacks and dangers of this process (Levison, et al., 1978). Third, it is suggested that

the current literature on mentoring is biased by not looking at the negative elements but assuming potential positive outcome from such a relationship (Wilbur, 1989). Any effort to formalize mentoring in the forensics community should, however, clearly be aware of potential problems with mentoring relationships and be committed to the review of any mentoring efforts or programs to assess effects and desirability.

One of the greatest concerns voiced at the conference was the need to be able to articulate what is meant by the term mentor and mentoring relationship. Several people felt that the term was rather ambiguous and formal and that a program such as this may take away from the already existing informal approach to mentoring.

Others felt that the most important issue was in finding a mentor. The most widespread concern raised was having information available to novice coaches about who they can use as mentors/resource people. It seemed apparent from the discussion that a clear and identifiable means of targeting mentors was needed for a coach looking for assistance from his/her peers.

Another quite common concern was that mentoring could/should occur at two levels. The first level is what was termed the "Learning the ropes level". This level would include - how to get on a tournament mailing list, someone to explain what all the different acronyms mean (AFA NIET, PKD, ADS, etc.), someone to help explain the leg system, which topics or selections are

appropriate for college competition, which tournaments might be the best for their team to travel to, etc. The second level was described as the "Professional development level". This level would include - advisement in conducting forensics research, help in becoming involved in forensic organizations and committees, promoting novice coaches on their own campuses, etc.

A final concern dealt with the coach who is not a "novice" but is in need of a mentor. Some people felt that there were some coaches who are not strictly "novices" but would still benefit from having a mentor to help guide them. Maybe a coach who changes districts, or is making the move from high school to college coaching etc., these people need some support not generally afforded them most current situations.

Mentoring appears to be an under utilized method of training and developing forensics coaches. In our first paper Carver and I encouraged forensics coaches and established forensics organizations to initiate discussions that would plan for the development and extension of mentoring practices and programs. The following are suggestions for how one might establish a mentoring relationship.

Mentoring is something we all can do and should do. It is our responsibility as members of the forensics community to nurture the growth and development of those in this field. This activity is only as strong as our are coaches. As a follow up to her interest in mentoring, Cindy Carver, District Four chair, sent out a letter at the beginning of the academic year asking

for the names of new coaches in the district so that they could be identified, introduced and sent further details regarding district information and mailings. In the state of Minnesota a committee has been formed by the Minnesota Collegiate Forensic Association which will serve to help coaches and forensics programs which are struggling to survive. This committee is interested in examining ways to tap into other state organizations to offer workshops and seminars for novice coaches. These are a few examples of how some things might be done to begin a formalized approach to mentoring.

Sharon Porter has compiled an excellent directory which lists the names of one or two mentors for each state. This is a wonderful model for district or state organizations to establish as well. Expanding upon this concept with a directory, including background sketches on individual mentors, might make a new coach feel more comfortable when approaching a potential mentor.

Retired forensics coaches are an excellent asset which the forensic community needs to utilize more effectively. The wealth of knowledge and experience that exists in past forensics coaches and administrators is certainly in need of taping as a valuable resource. I would venture to guess that at most institutions there are a number of collegues who have had some level of forensic experience in their careers in the communication field. In my own situation I have five collegues at Concordia who have been active/successful coaches and adminstrators in college forensics. I might add that this includes a former debate coach,

now president of the college. There is another paper on this panel that will be examining this issue more closely.

Mentoring also needs to begin with assistance given to our graduate students. We often assume that our graduate assistants have the background they need to be effective coaches. One or two classes (if any), are not enough to teach areas such as, how to prepare and defend a budget, ballot writing, handling of interpersonal conflicts, how to balance classroom needs with travel needs, etc..

It is also important to support and promote the novice coach on their home campus. Members of their home departments as well as administrators need to be made aware of the accomplishments of their new forensic faculty members. This function is especially important for new coaches who are coaching alone at their school or who are on campuses where other department members or administrators are not familiar with the forensic activity. Budget decisions, as well as, renewal, tenure and promotion decisions for new coaches are all tied to the degree to which new coaches have been promoted on their own campuses. Outside letters of support and encouragement can often prove a successful technique to gain continued awareness and support for a forensic program.

Finally, continued support by the National, District and State organizations must remain a constant support structure for our new coaches. What better way for the future of our forensic community to prosper then by coaches helping coaches.

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